# Rolex Explorer I: Back to the Himalayas

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Just like the old and wise shaman of a native tribe who enchants the young with myths, I enjoy telling stories about watches and watchmakers who have forever marked the history of the timepiece. Among these brands, there is obviously Rolex. It's very likely that I've already written to you in length about Pepsi's impact, or the renowned Daytona. It's about time that I share the story of the Rolex Explorer "I" with you all. Much too often placed in the background, this fine specimen existed long before the Submariner and the GMT Master. *Shall we never forget.*

## A story of a mountain exploration

As with a great number of stories about legendary watches, it starts high up in altitude. We are at the beginning of the 1950's and the highest peaks of the Himalayas are still waiting to be conquered by Man. It is then that Tenzing Norgay, Nepalese sherpa, along with Sir Edmund Hillary, New Zealander mountain-climber, begin their historic ascent of Mount Everest. On May 29th, 1953, this magnificent challenge is met. On the wrist of the New Zealander, a Smiths A.609. As for the Nepalese, a watch entrusted by the Rolex company, and which will serve as reference for the future "Explorer."

Before the expedition, 6098, 6298, and 6150 Bubbleback were the official references that reigned. 36mm of pure pleasure. A simple and elegant watch with just a hint of the Explorer. The 6150, with its engraging black dial, displaying the little "3, 6, 9," will give you a chill. We shall appropriately name this the "pre-explorer". A handful of white dials are included in the affair, as well as the "HoneyComb" dials that almost bring a tear to my eyes. Only the 6350 differentiates itself from the rest with the mention "Officially Certified Chronometer," and that will sport the name "Explorer" in 1953. In all honesty, the Explorer existed before 1953. A number of 6350 models were made without the mention "Explorer."

The dial type displaying "3, 6, 9" is an ode to exploration. A simple and easy-to-read dial for those who adventure off to high or low peaks. A solid case in the same spirit as BubbleBacks, evoking robustness and reliability. The resistance is also made to tolerate extreme temperatures. This indicates parts, as well as their lubricants and robust oils, that are able to handle temperatures as low as -70°C or as high as 40°C.

The back echoing that of the Bubbleback will fade with time.

Particularly with the reference 6610 that will replace 6150 in 1959, but above all with the famous 1016 that takes over the 6610 in 1963. Beyond the simple flatter body, we mainly notice a difference in the degree of waterproofness and in movement.

Introductions.

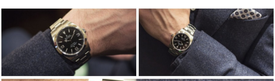
## Rolex Explorer 1016: 26 years of good and loyal service

Explorer's legendary 1016 model didn't come on the scene by itself. It's accompanied by a new caliber, the 1560. Mountain exploreers, hardened by the highest peaks, will also be able to swim at more than 100 meters deep. The caliber will evolve into 1570 and boast a stop-seconds function, a to-the-second precision when synchronizing time.

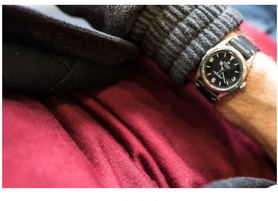
Here we find everything we like in the Explorer. An easy-to-read dial of exceptional simplicity with "Mercedes" type watch hands. A fine watch that almost floats on the wrist. The 3, 6, and 9 present.

At the end of the 1980's we continue on to a new reference of Explorer. The famous reference 14710. Fans of the 1016 will cry out scandal, regretting its classicism and style at the arrival of the new, more modern and sportier reference. The markers applied are circled in white gold. Sapphire takes over plexiglass. Then in 2001, the 114270 takes over the scene with a slightly different caliber.

Finally, the most common reference, 214270, will see the light of day in 2010. *Complete and utter dismay.* The usual 36mm is dethroned for an opening at 39mm. Will the modern craze for larger watches change everything? The shiny aspect of the popular 3, 6, and 9 is lost, now completely circled in white gold. The minute hand won't exactly follow the increase in diameter. A problem that will find a solution in 2016 during the salon of Basel with the presentation of the new reference 214570.



Success. Undeniably so. A watch that we can easily imagine on our wrist, and for the rest of our days. A rare timelessness exemplified by a watch as discreet as it is ready to confront the most hostile of conditions. The reference 1016 remains in my opinion the perfect balance between the first "pre-explorer" Rolex watches from the beginning of the 1950's, and the more recent models. I haven't forgotten the Explorer II, but it deserves an article of its own.



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